

Unity

6-207

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

230 Park Avenue, New York City

STUDY OF CHURCH UNITY MOVEMENTS

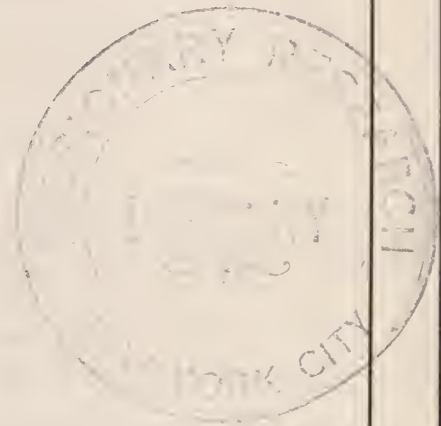
RESULTS OF

BALLOT ON CHURCH UNION

Preliminary Report

by

H. Paul Douglass, Director



(Release to Religious Press, September, 1932)

BALLOT ON CHURCH UNION

Preliminary Report

During the spring and summer of 1932, some forty denominational periodicals ran a ballot on church union in behalf of the Institute of Social and Religious Research. The Institute simultaneously circulated the ballot in connection with some of its questionnaires. A first instalment of returns received up to July 15 consisted of 7,293 ballots. This is regarded as a sufficient sample in quantity and variety to warrant the following preliminary report:

The form of the ballot as circulated and the result of the voting were as follows:

| QUESTIONS | Votes Favoring | |
|--|----------------|-----------|
| | No. | Per Cent. |
| "If you had to decide now what the religious people of the United States should do about church union - would you | | |
| (a) Adopt some form of permanent and binding federal union of denominations, after the analogy of the state and Federal Government in the United States? | 2360 | 32.4 |
| (b) Continue essentially the present system of separate denominations? | 2098 | 28.8 |
| (c) Unite the various church bodies into one church?. | 2357 | 32.3 |
| Mixed ballots (more than one vote on the ballot . . . | 478 | 6.5 |
| TOTAL | 7293 | 100.0 |

The outstanding feature of these results is that more than twice as many replies favor union in some form as favor the continuance of the present denominational system. Just about as many are for federal union as for general union.

If the mixed ballots are added to those favoring continuance of the denominational system, the returns are divided almost exactly into thirds.

It is significant that every fifteenth person disregarded instructions of the ballot and voted for more than one alternative. In a political election such ballots would be thrown out as defective. In this summary, they are included because they throw light on the desire very often expressed in letters accompanying the ballots to vote one way for today, another way for tomorrow and still another for the millenium. In brief, an appreciable number who balloted were really not ready to precipitate their choice upon a single alternative.

However, it can scarcely be judged as other than highly significant that two out of three replies indicate definite willingness to scrap the present denominational system for some specific form of church union.

The union of related denominations was made a separate question in the ballot, and stated as follows: "Would you get churches belonging to the same denominational families to unite?" Nine out of every ten votes favored at least so much of union.

What denominations contributed to these results and how was their sentiment divided? This will be found by reference to Table I.

Table I. BALLOT ON CHURCH UNION

Denominations Ranked By Per Cent. of Ballots, Favoring:

| Continuance of Present Denominational Order | | | Federal Union | | General Union | |
|--|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Denomination | No. of Ballots | Per Cent. | Denomination | Per Cent. | Denomination | Per Cent. |
| Lutheran..... | 241 | 58.9 | Evangelical..... | 54.5 | Disciples..... | 64.5 |
| Presbyterian, U.S. | 415 | 53.3 | Reformed bodies... | 40.8 | Misc.smaller Den.. | 39.5 |
| Bapt. (So. Conv.). | 174 | 51.1 | Cong. - Christian. | 40.1 | Meth. Epis..... | 35.6 |
| Bapt. (No. Conv.). | 306 | 41.8 | Friends..... | 37.0 | Meth. Epis. South. | 34.1 |
| Prot. Epis..... | 485 | 41.6 | United Brethren... | 35.3 | Presb. U.S.A..... | 34.1 |
| Friends..... | 192 | 38.5 | Presb. U.S.A..... | 34.9 | Meth. Prot..... | 34.0 |
| Unitarian..... | 154 | 38.3 | Meth. Epis..... | 34.7 | Cong. - Christian. | 30.6 |
| Meth. Prot..... | 100 | 34.0 | Bapt. (No. Conv.). | 33.0 | United Brethren... | 30.2 |
| Meth. Epis. South. | 372 | 30.6 | Meth. Epis. South. | 32.8 | Unitarian..... | 28.6 |
| United Brethren... | 139 | 30.2 | Meth. Prot..... | 28.0 | Prot. Epis..... | 27.6 |
| Reformed bodies... | 179 | 27.9 | Unitarian..... | 27.9 | Reformed bodies... | 25.7 |
| Misc. smaller Den. | 787 | 27.2 | Misc. smaller Den. | 27.7 | Friends..... | 24.0 |
| Evangelical..... | 121 | 24.8 | Prot. Epis..... | 27.3 | Bapt. (No. Conv.). | 22.2 |
| Cong. - Christian. | 873 | 21.9 | Bapt. (So. Conv.). | 25.4 | Bapt. (So. Conv.). | 21.8 |
| Presb. U.S.A..... | 756 | 19.7 | Presb. U.S..... | 25.3 | Presb. U.S..... | 19.3 |
| Meth. Epis..... | 1673 | 18.8 | Lutheran..... | 23.2 | Evangelical..... | 19.0 |
| Disciples..... | 326 | 13.5 | Disciples..... | 17.5 | Lutheran..... | 14.2 |
| Total of Ballots.. | 7293 | 28.8 | Total of Ballots.. | 32.4 | Total of Ballots.. | 32.3 |

The figures in the second column of the Table, showing how the 7,293 were divided among the denominations, proves that the sample was large enough to get a slant on the actual sentiment of those concerned. Sixteen denominations with less than one hundred votes each were combined under the heading of miscellaneous smaller denominations. The number of ballots is somewhat proportionate to the respective memberships of the denominations, although some of the smaller ones were rather over-represented.

The Table ranks the denominations according to the degree of support given to each of the three options included in the ballot. The reader will be particularly interested in his own denomination. To get the distribution of its opinion, he should look for its position in each of the three columns. If the percentage of mixed ballots (which is not given) were added the sum of its percentages in the three columns would equal 100 per cent. in each case.

A denomination which gives most of its votes to one of the three propositions naturally has not many left for the other two. Thus, Lutherans led the list in approval of the present denominational system; which puts the Lutheran next to the bottom in approval of federal union, and at the bottom in approval of general union. The Disciples, on the contrary, are at the bottom of the first two columns, but at the top of the third. This obviously reflects the historic commitment of this denomination to union.

The best way to study the results is to divide each column into fourths as is indicated in the spacing of the Table and to note what denominations are highest, lowest, and what are above the middle and below the middle on each point. The Methodist Episcopal, South, replies occupy the middle position in the first two columns, the Unitarians the middle position in the third. Naturally, one will want to examine the position of certain particular denominations relative to others and probably apparent explanations of the standing of each will occur to him.

A systematic summary discloses the following interesting pattern of opinion: Of denominations which are strongly in favor of the continuance of the present denominational system, three are strongly against both federal or general union, namely the Lutheran, Southern Baptist and Southern Presbyterian. The fourth, the Northern Baptist, gives more than average approval to federal union, but much less than average approval to general union.

Of denominations which are strongly against the continuance of the present denominational order, the Congregational-Christian is strongly for federal union, while the Disciples and Methodist Episcopal are for general union. The fourth of the denominations most opposed to the present order, the Presbyterian, U.S.A., gives more than average approval both to federal and to general union. Other denominations which have a decisive bias in one direction but are not extreme in either of the opposing directions are the Friends, which are strongly for federal union, the Methodist Episcopal, South, which are strongly for general union, and the Evangelical, which shows little support for general union.

The vote of the Protestant Episcopal Church is almost equally divided between the two union positions presented, with a rather strong minority favoring the continuance of the denominational order. Opinion in no other important denomination is so widely divided.

No interpretation of results will be attempted in this preliminary report. It will be noted, however, that the denominations most favorable to federal union are relatively small ones which could not hope to constitute very distinguished factors within a vast general union. In other words, relative size may or may not act in part to explain varying preferences on this point.

The 2,357 persons who voted for general church union were asked to take a second thought to see whether they really meant union without qualification. Two-thirds of them found that they actually intended to exclude one or more of the eight denominations listed in Column I of Table II.

Table II. PER CENT. OF 2357 CHURCH UNION BALLOTS FAVORING GENERAL UNION

WHICH EXCLUDED SPECIFIED DENOMINATIONS FROM GENERAL CHURCH UNION

| | | Per Cent. Cross Outs | | | |
|------------------------|-------|----------------------|------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Excluded Denominations | Total | Median | | Highest | Lowest |
| Spiritualist.. | 46.6 | Presb. U.S.... | 51.3 | Meth. Prot... 85.3 | Baptist South. 31.6 |
| Mormon..... | 45.8 | Reformed..... | 50.0 | Meth. Prot... 85.3 | Friends..... 21.7 |
| Roman Catholic | 43.4 | Lutheran..... | 47.1 | Meth. Prot... 76.5 | Prot. Epis.... 16.4 |
| Jew..... | 41.9 | Lutheran..... | 44.1 | Meth. Prot... 76.5 | Unitarian..... 15.9 |
| Christian Sci. | 37.9 | Baptist North | 38.2 | Meth. Prot... 82.4 | Friends..... 19.6 |
| Unitarian..... | 28.8 | Disciples.... | 27.6 | Meth. Prot... 79.4 | Friends..... 13.0 |
| Pentecostal... | 22.4 | Baptist North | 20.6 | Meth. Prot... 58.8 | Disciples..... 15.7 |
| Negro churches | 17.5 | Reformed..... | 15.2 | Baptist South | 57.7 |
| No cross outs. | 35.0 | M. E. | 29.9 | Friends..... 56.5 | Meth. Prot.... 8.8 |
| | | M. E. South. } | | | |

Since the total discrimination did not always fall against any one denomination, the range of exclusions was 46.6 per cent. in the case of Spiritualists at one extreme, and 17.5 per cent. against Negro churches at the other.

A striking testimony to the reliability of this showing is found in a previous Institute report on organized Protestant cooperation which, in the case of an entirely different Protestant constituency numbering some 2,000, shows almost exactly the same order of antipathy against the denominations listed.¹

Space will not permit a listing of each denomination in respect to each of the above named marginal groups, but the above table shows what denominations occupy the middle and what denominations the extreme positions with respect to each.

On the present data Methodist Protestant sentiment is by far the most exclusive. This covers all the marginal groups except the Negro churches which Southern Baptists are most inclined to exclude. The Friends, on the other hand, are the most friendly of the denominations, on the whole and in three specific instances. The affinity of the Protestant Episcopal Church for the Roman Catholic, and of the Unitarian for the Jews is a matter of common observation.²

On this showing one must admit that the vote in favor of general church union is considerably modified by the amount of exclusiveness confessed by those voting for it. One must recall, however, that while the excluded list is rather long, it includes no large Protestant denomination. Omitting Roman Catholics and Jews, only a very inconsiderable fraction of non-Roman Christians would be left out by those who vote for general church union.

¹Douglass, Protestant Cooperation in American Cities, p. 30.

²The ranking of denominations according to order of exclusiveness is also confirmed by the Institute study already cited. Of denominations included in both studies the same three occupy the top of the list in both, two of the three occupy the middle range in both, and two of the three occupy the lowest range in both. To be explicit, only the Lutheran and Presbyterian, U.S.A., returns disagree in general grouping.

The union of related denominations is advocated by nine-tenths of all votes. Nearly all Disciples are favorable to it and the Evangelical, Methodist Episcopal and Lutheran votes also fall in the high group; while Presbyterian, U.S., Protestant Episcopal, Baptist (Southern Convention) and Methodist Protestant constitute the least favorable group. This is shown in Table III.

Table III. BALLOT ON UNION OF RELATED DENOMINATIONS

| Denomination | Per Cent. Favoring | Denomination | Per Cent. Favoring |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Disciples of Christ... | 97.1 | Unitarian..... | 89.4 |
| Evangelical..... | 96.0 | Friends..... | 89.0 |
| Meth. Epis..... | 94.8 | Meth. Epis., South.... | 88.2 |
| Lutheran..... | 94.4 | Misc. smaller Denom... | 86.6 |
| Presbyterian, U.S.A... | 93.4 | Presbyterian, U.S..... | 86.3 |
| United Brethren..... | 93.2 | Prot. Epis..... | 84.1 |
| Reformed bodies..... | 93.1 | Baptist (So. Conv.)... | 83.5 |
| Baptist (No. Conv.)... | 92.1 | Meth. Prot..... | 82.4 |
| Congregational-Christian | | 92.0 | |

It is perhaps significant that three of the four denominations least favorable to family reunion have recently been agitated by this issue within their own denominational households.

Turning from the denominational comparison, the ballots were next counted regionally and according to the type of community in which the voter lived. No appreciable difference appeared between the attitudes of city, town and country voters. One was not more or less conservative or progressive than the others.

Regionally, however, marked differences of attitude emerged. This appears in Table IV.

Table IV. BALLOT ON CHURCH UNION: REGIONAL COMPARISONS

| | | Per Cent. of Ballots Favoring | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------|-------------------------------|
| States by Regions | No. of Ballots | Continuation of Present Denom. | Federal Union | General Union | Mixed Ballots | Total | Union of Related Denom. |
| New England and Middle Atlantic | 2,090 | 27.0 | 36.9 | 29.9 | 6.2 | 100 | 92.0 |
| North Central.... | 2,584 | 25.0 | 32.1 | 33.8 | 9.1 | 100 | 93.0 |
| So. Atlantic and South Central.. | 1,930 | 38.3 | 26.8 | 31.5 | 3.4 | 100 | 86.1 |
| Mountain and Pacific..... | 607 | 21.3 | 34.9 | 36.9 | 6.9 | 100 | 96.5 |

The South is nearly twice as strong for the existing denominational system as the West is; the Northeast is the stronghold of federation sentiment with the West but little behind. The West again leads in union sentiment with North Central region not far behind. These results reflect in large measure the regional character of denominationalism.

A count of the ballots by age and by sex showed some interesting results. People under thirty are somewhat more favorable to the existing denominational system than those over thirty, and people under twenty most favorable of all. Whatever may be the theoretical attitude of its representatives when confronted by a proposal for action in a matter about which it probably feels little responsibility, youth takes refuge behind the status quo.

The comparison of the votes of males with those of females shows noteworthy contrast but not extreme contrast.

Table V. BALLOT ON CHURCH UNION:

Comparison of Male and Female Votes

| | | Per Cent. of Ballots Favoring | | | | | |
|-------------|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|-------------------------|
| Sex | No. of Ballots | Continuation of Present Denom. | Federal Union | General Union | Mixed Ballots | Total | Union of Related Denom. |
| Male..... | 4,471 | 27.2 | 35.0 | 31.0 | 6.8 | 100 | 92.2 |
| Female..... | 2,724 | 31.6 | 28.0 | 34.4 | 6.0 | 100 | 89.4 |

Women are appreciably more attached to the existing denominational order than men; they are less favorable to the union of denominational families, but at the same time more favorable to general union.

A final comparison was made between clerical and lay votes. Here much more pronounced differences appeared. Laymen are much more attached to the existing denominational order than are clergymen; but like women are also more strongly for general union. It is the clergy particularly who stand for federal union and for the union of related denominational families.

Table VI. BALLOT ON CHURCH UNION:

Comparison of Clerical and Lay Votes

| | | Per Cent. of Ballots Favoring | | | | | |
|------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|-------------------------|
| Status in Church | No. of Ballots | Continuation of Present Denom. | Federal Union | General Union | Mixed Ballots | Total | Union of Related Denom. |
| Clergy..... | 2,242 | 24.9 | 41.4 | 26.9 | 6.8 | 100 | 95.4 |
| Laity..... | 4,767 | 30.0 | 29.0 | 34.9 | 6.1 | 100 | 89.5 |

Subdividing still more closely, theological students are found readiest of all to give up the present denominational order; then ministers; then lay church officers; while laymen not in any office are most attached to the past. Theological students go ministers considerably better in the amount of approval given to federal union. Three hundred seventy-six persons not church-members at all voted on church union. Curiously they are decidedly more in favor of general union than are the twenty times as many church-members who voted. The non-church-member, on the contrary, has a very low opinion of church federation.

Since the count on which this report was made, twice as many ballots have come to hand. If this second instalment and the ballots still to come in agree with the first instalment, the validity of the sample will be correspondingly strengthened. If not, the variations will be instructive. Numerous other denominations have now yielded enough ballots to be separately commented upon in a later report. When the returns are completed, interpretations will be in order; but these must wait on the completion of the Institute's total study of church unity movements which will still require many months before publication.